

'em it's mine?" as little Roy burst into a very loud 'Happy Birthday to You,' and the manager told Ruth and Ellis' waitress, "Get a cake over there quick, with candles, lots of candles."

SOMETHING'S GONE HAYWIRE WITH GRAVITY

A meteor landed in Clete and Juanita's back yard, leaving a ten-foot-diameter crater in the middle of the lawn. The Loma Alta Tribune ran a front page article and photo, and the local T.V. news station sent over a camera crew. The publicity drew crowds, and Clete, at his neighbor's suggestion, started charging admission and leading tours that skirted the circumference of the crater: "But don't get too close," he'd warn the folks. "Something's gone haywire with gravity in there."

How did he know? The college students who'd been bussed in to sift the hot dirt in search of meteorite chunks would unexpectedly bounce into the air and float and spin like astronauts, and — being college students — pair off and twirl into impromptu, upside-down, levitating lambadas, while the astronomer in charge screamed at them to quit grab-assing around and get back to work.

When the excitement died down, Clete had a swimming pool installed at a discount, because the hole was already there, and one evening when he and Juanita were sitting on lawn chairs on the patio, sipping tall drinks, listening to the pool filter's sighs, the water — all ten thousand gallons of it — rose up out of the cement-lined crater and wobbled into a gelatinous, sapphire globe that hovered, roof-high, and started to spin. Its equator bulged, and the ball flattened into an acre-wide disk before it broke into a billion droplets.

Clete and Juanita looked at each other, and Clete said, "Whoa!"

And about those college students: two of them sneaked down into the crater while the rest of the crew was on a lunch break and got naked and conceived a child. And you know what? That kid could fly; before he could walk, he could fly.

DIRTY MOVIE

Clete skimmed the pool with his net, scooping the June bugs out of the water. The trapped insects, their bodies the color of caramel drop Sugar Baby candies, their legs

crooked and crustacean-like, struggled in the fine-mesh net. Clete had caught a dozen of them, and there were at least a dozen more floating free in the pool, waving their legs, waiting for him. This was therapy for Clete, walking without his cane, using both arms to wield his pole.

Ellis' head popped up over the fence from next door and said, "Hey, Clete! Mind if I come over? I got a dirty movie we can watch." He held up a plastic video case and leered. "Come on over, Ellis," said Clete. Words just seemed to be falling together for him these days, just falling into place. Ellis dropped the movie over the fence onto the grass and began to hoist himself up behind it. The old fence wiggled and swayed when he hooked his instep on the top board, and when he got his body up onto the fence top, ready to drop down, the board he was gripping snapped and Ellis tumbled hard to the ground.

Clete dropped his pole. The June bugs he had captured floated out of the net. "Are you O.K., Ellis?" he said. He walked to his fallen friend, his gait jerky and spastic in his excitement. If he could concentrate on his walk, he could keep it smooth, but the goal now was to move from point A to Point B. He didn't care if he looked good doing it; Ellis might have been hurt.

He wasn't, though. He had the wind knocked out of him and his shoulder was sore, but he was O.K. He picked up his movie and they went inside to watch it.

But it wasn't the movie they thought it would be. It was The Little Mermaid, one of Ellis' young son's cartoon movies. "What the fuck is this?" said Ellis, leaning forward in his chair and gripping the arm rests. "What the fuck?" said Clete. A pretty little girl in a sea shell cup bikini top was swimming around under the sea. "What the hell is this?" Ellis said.

The phone rang. Ellis answered it for Clete. It was Ellis' wife Ruth. She and Clete's wife Juanita were having coffee and chatting next door. "How do you like the movie, Ellis?" she said. Then both ladies broke up laughing. Ellis held the receiver away from his ear so Clete could hear them. "Bitches," said Ellis, pointing to the phone. "Yeah, bitches," said Clete.

THE GRAVITY VARIATIONS

Ellis Leahy bounced on the diving board in Clete Johnson's back yard. His hairy belly jiggled, and his swimming trunks rode so low that the crack in his ass was revealed. "Do us a favor and put a God-damned shirt on, Ellis,"